

### **U.S. Interests Section Newsletter**

Information for American Citizens in Cuba Volume 1 Issue 1 January-March 2008





#### WELCOME MESSAGE FROM U.S. INTERESTS SECTION CHIEF OF MISSION MICHAEL E. PARMLY

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the first issue of the U.S. Interests Section Newsletter! The purpose of this newsletter is to provide the U.S. citizen community in Cuba with information about consular services and programs and to pass on important messages regarding health and security issues. I hope this newsletter contributes to making your stay in Cuba as safe and pleasant as possible. Whether you are a short-term visitor or a long-time resident, I wish you and your family the very best for 2008.

### USINT HOSTS FIRST MEETING OF U.S. CITIZEN WARDENS IN CUBA

On November 23, 2007, the American Citizen Services Unit (ACS) hosted the First Annual Warden's meeting at the residence of the Chief of Mission (COM) in Havana City. About 33 wardens from 10 Cuban provinces attended the meeting. Consul General Sean Murphy welcomed the guests, and thanked the wardens for their valuable service to U.S. citizen residents. USINT speakers covered a wide variety of topics including hurricane preparedness, personal security, and the importance of taking precautions against COM Michael Parmly dengue fever. concluded the formal agenda with a discussion of the current state of U.S.-Cuban relations. Following his remarks, participants shared a Thanksgiving-themed lunch (the meeting was held the day after the holiday). The ACS Unit looks forward to working with the wardens throughout this New Year, and we welcome your input as we continue to improve the warden system.



#### In This Issue...

Expedited Non-Immigrant Visa Interview for
Spouses and Minor Children of Americans in Cuba

Effective January 1, spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens residing in Cuba may obtain expedited non-immigrant visa interviews. Applicants must present the U.S. passport of the parent or spouse and either the marriage certificate or birth certificate as appropriate on the day of the interview. Please note this service is being offered as a courtesy to U.S. citizens resident in Cuba and does not change U.S. immigration law regarding eligibility for a non-immigrant visa. For more information or to schedule an expedited appointment, please call the Consular Information Unit at (537) 834-4400.

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#### CUBAN FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROGRAM SEEKS TO EXPEDITE PROCESSING OF FAMILY-BASED PETITIONS



On November 21, 2007, The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the launching of the Cuban Family Reunification Program (CFRP). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is offering beneficiaries of approved family—based immigrant visa petitions an opportunity to come to the United States, rather than remain in Cuba waiting to apply for lawful permanent resident status (i.e. "green card).

Cuban nationals who reside in Cuba and who are beneficiaries of a properly filed I-130 petition that has been approved, but for which an immigrant visa is not yet immediately available, are eligible.

Participation in the CFRP is not available to Cuban nationals who could qualify as "immediate relatives". Immediate relatives include the spouses, minor children, and parents of U.S. citizens. Immigrant visas are immediately available to persons in these categories. Cuban nationals who are adult children, brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens, or spouses and unmarried children of legal permanent residents of the U.S. could benefit from this program.

The National Visa Center will shortly begin mailing letters to everyone who has an approved family-based petition for a Cuban national. The letter will include further instructions on how to apply.

For more information visit the website <u>www.uscis.gov</u> or call the USCIS National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283.

#### Attention Students!!!

# Foreign Service Written Exam to be Offered at U.S. Interests Section on March 8, 2008

Have you ever thought that you might like to work in a U.S. Embassy abroad? One way to do so is to become a Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Department of State. The first step is taking the Foreign Service Written Exam. The exam will be offered at the U.S. Interests Section on Saturday, March 8, 2008. For more information or to register for the exam, go to www.careers.state.gov.

## USINT ENCOURAGES U.S. CITIZENS RESIDING IN CUBA TO VOTE IN 2008



2008 is an important election year in the United States.

The ACS Unit encourages you to register to vote and/or request absentee ballots. The basic absentee voting process is as follows:

- You complete an application form (see below) and send it to local election officials in the U.S.
- The local official approves your request, or contacts you for further information.
- The local official sends you an absentee ballot.
- You vote the ballot and send it back in time to meet your state's deadline.

As you know, registration and ballot request procedures and deadlines vary by state. The official US Government website for overseas absentee voting assistance is the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at <a href="https://www.fvap.gov">www.fvap.gov</a> (http://www.fvap.gov>. It has a wealth of information about absentee voting, including the downloadable absentee ballot application (SF-76, Federal Post Card Application, or FPCA), state-specific instructions for completing the form, and links to or contact numbers for state and local officials.

USINT Havana invites you to visit the American Citizen Services office. We have registration and application forms and voting assistance guides you can use. We are also happy to answer any questions you may have about the process to get you started.

### Important 2008 Income Tax Information

We will soon be entering a new tax season, and the U.S. Interests Section would like to remind American citizens who earned taxable income to pay their taxes. The best place to start your research is at the IRS website <a href="http://www.irs.gov">http://www.irs.gov</a> which provides specific information on tax obligations for American citizens living overseas. We also recommend you take a look at a PowerPoint presentation with tax information for U.S. citizens residing abroad, which can be found at <a href="http://havana.usinterestsection.gov/acs.html">http://havana.usinterestsection.gov/acs.html</a>.

# The New E-Passport: More Security for Everyone



The U.S. State Department has begun to issue a new passport called the e-passport. The e-passport incorporates updated security features and a new design. In addition, the e-passport will also carry an imbedded chip that will contain coded information from the passport's biographical data page that will be unique to the passport holder. This feature will help detect fraudulent or stolen passports, and also increase the overall security of our nation's borders.

You can see images of the new passport at the website <a href="http://travel.state.gov">http://travel.state.gov</a>



#### **Lost and Stolen Passports**

The Consular Section is receiving an increasing number of applications for lost and stolen passports. All citizens are reminded to be careful with this valuable document, and to please remind others to safeguard their passports as well. Not only does it cost time and money to replace the passport, the person losing the passport runs the risk of possible identity theft by criminal elements. Please be careful and remind others to be careful too!

### 10 Things You Should Know About Dengue Fever



- 1. Dengue fever is a viral infection that is spread to humans primarily by the bite of female *Aedes* mosquitoes.
- 2. There are an estimated 100 million cases of dengue ("break bone fever") each year in the tropics.
- 3. Dengue fever is considered endemic in tropical regions of Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. Currently, risk to travelers seems to be highest in Southeast Asia and Latin America.
- 4. Dengue occurs more frequently during warm, humid seasons, and transmission is more intense in urban areas, including downtown business areas.
- 5. Aedes aegypti, the mosquitoes that spread dengue, are daytime feeders with 2 peaks of biting activity during the day: the first 2-3 hours after dawn and the mid-to-late afternoon hours. This pattern, however, turns to one of all-day activity during overcast days or indoor, where they prefer to rest unnoticed, in close contact with humans.
- All persons in an endemic area are at risk of acquiring dengue. In most endemic areas, older children and young adults seem to be most commonly affected.
- 7. The risk is higher for those staying in inappropriately conditioned facilities (i.e., places with nearby stagnant water reservoirs and no mosquito protection), but transmission can occur in any urban setting.
- 8. There is no vaccine against dengue, so travelers to dengue-endemic areas must use repellents and take other preventive measures at all times, being especially vigilant during early morning and late afternoon hours.
- 9. After the infecting bite, dengue symptoms develop within 3 to 14 days (on average, 4 to 7 days). Victims typically experience a sudden high fever, headache, generalized weakness, and intense muscle, joint, and low back pain (hence the term, "break bone fever"). A subtle rash appears in up to half the people affected, although some have a bright red rash with scattered clear spots.
- 10. Dengue is usually self-limited, with an average duration of 6 days. Most persons with dengue do not need to be hospitalized, but those with persistent fever should seek medical attention as soon as possible.

## The American Citizens Services Unit is Here to Help!!



Here is a list of some of the emergency services we provide:

Lost or Stolen Passports: If you lose your passport, ACS can help you obtain a replacement. In case of theft, you should immediately report the incident to Cuban police and obtain a copy of the police report. Medical Assistance: If you are sick or injured, ACS can assist you in finding medical care and can contact family or a friend at your request.

**Emergency Funds:** If your money has been lost or stolen, ACS can help you contact your family or friends and arrange for them to transfer funds to you.

Arrests: Americans in Cuba are subject to Cuban law. In the unfortunate event that an American is arrested, the United States government cannot get the citizen out of jail. ACS can provide a list of local attorneys and legal resources, visit the arrestee to monitor treatment, and act as a liaison between family and friends in the U.S. ACS can also assist families in transferring money, food, and clothing to those being held in Cuban jails or prisons.

**Death abroad:** In the unfortunate event of a death in Cuba, we can work with family in the U.S to arrange for the transfer of remains from Cuba.

**Disasters:** ACS can contact your relatives to let them know that you are safe in the case of a natural disaster.

**Emergency situation:** It is a good idea if you give your family in the U.S the following number at the State Department to call in an emergency situation: (202) 647-5225

#### Health Corner -Avian Flu Fact Sheet

Please review the Avian Flu fact sheet located at <a href="http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health\_118">http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health\_118</a>
<a href="line">1.html</a>, which alerts Americans to the Department of State's preparedness efforts with respect to a possible influenza pandemic. The Department of State emphasizes that, in the event of a pandemic, its ability to assist Americans traveling and residing abroad may be severely limited by restrictions on local and international movement imposed for public health reasons, either by foreign governments and/or the United States.

# Attention Wardens! Don't Forget Test of Warden System in March/April

As announced at the Warden Meeting in November, we will be conducting a test of the warden system in March or April. Please remember to call ACS after the test has been concluded to provide us with feedback and to report any changes to your registrant lists.

### Important Announcement Regarding Cuban-Origin Goods or Services

Goods or services of Cuban origin may not be imported into the United States either directly or through third countries, such as Canada or Mexico. The only exceptions are publications, artwork, or other informational materials.

Contact Information: American Citizen Services, Consular Section, U.S. Interests Section, Havana, Cuba

Address: Calzada e/ L y M. Vedad, Ciudad Habana Telephone: (53)(7) 8333551 to 59, Fax (57)(3) 833-1653

Website: http://havana.usinterestsection.gov/ Walk-in Hours: Mon.-Thu. 8:00-4:30pm, Fri. 8:00-3:30 pm.

Closed U.S. & Cuban Holidays